

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
Minutes of Meeting
March 29, 2012

Members present: Peter May, Chairman representing the National Park Service (NPS), Mina Wright representing the General Services Administration (GSA), Thomas Luebke representing the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), Christine Saum representing the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), Mike Turnbull representing the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), Michael Conley representing the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), and Bradley Provancha representing the Secretary of Defense (DOD). Katry Harris was also present as a non-voting representative of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (the Commission) met for the first time this year at the Board Room of the Commission of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. An official transcript of the meeting is on record in the Commission's official files.

The Commission received a presentation from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.

Design Consultation – Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center

Fulfilling the requirement to consult with the Commission on the design of the Memorial, Thomas Wong, representing Ennead Architects and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (Fund), presented the visitor center design concept currently under consideration by the NCPC and the CFA. The visitor center will be built underground and located on Henry Bacon Drive near Lincoln Memorial Circle and the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (the Fund) is authorized to construct the visitor center.

Mr. Wong recalled the Fund's progress to date – the design was most recently reviewed by the CFA on February 24, and the Fund intends to return to the NCPC on May 5 with design refinements. Throughout the presentation Mr. Wong pointed to the NCPC and CFA joint guidelines provided to the Fund in 2006, and the Commission identified that the Fund had thus far proceeded in concert with the guidelines.

Members questioned the value and pattern of skylights, encouraging the sponsors to reconsider the use of skylights, particularly since the visitor center would also rely on artificial lighting and high-quality indoor lighting is widely available on the market.

Members also felt that the visitor center was taking on too large a role and presence at the Memorial. While intended to support the visitor experience at the Memorial, the visitor center design gives the impression that it is being elevated to be an independent destination and of a scale which would compete with the commemorative landscape. Members also felt the long horizontal canopy over the recessed courtyard entry should be reconsidered as it seems too visible in the landscape and is a distracting continuation of the Memorial's horizontal form.

The sponsors were also encouraged to consider a more limited palette of materials, which might give the visitor center a character more reflective of the subtlety of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The sponsors were reminded that the guidelines directed that no lighting encroach upon the views from the Lincoln Memorial and, accordingly, they were asked to consider the view of the visitor center's night lighting from the Lincoln Memorial podium. They agreed to do simulations to further study the night lighting of the visitor center.

A recommendation to consider relocating the food service kiosk was suggested to the NPS by a member who was concerned that the kiosk would be in a discordant location with the new visitor center.

Title I of Public Law 108-126 requires the Fund to adhere to terms of the Commemorative Works Act that are normally applied to memorials regarding siting and design of the visitor center. Thus applied, the Commemorative Works Act requires the Fund to bring the visitor center to the Commission for design consultation – an evaluation normally conducted on commemorative works that are not as technically complex as an underground building designed for public visitation and exhibitions – and some members voiced discomfort at the level of detailed technical review that was prompted by this consultation.

Chairman May advised that, per the Commemorative Works Act, no approval action was required, thus the Commission would not take a vote, but the Commission would provide a written summary of members' consultative comments to the Fund.

There being no other business for the day, Chairman May adjourned the meeting at 2:20 p.m.